

Methods of argument which are fashionable may train people to flippancy, sophistry, levity of mind, and may destroy the power to think and reason correctly. Scherr<sup>1</sup> says that fashion served as a means to transfer to Germany the depravation of morals which had corrupted the Latin nations in the sixteenth century. Fashions now spread through all civilized nations by contact and contagion. They are spread by literature.

197. Slang and expletives. Slang and expletives are fashions in language. Expletives are of all grades from simple interjections to the strongest profanity. Many expletives are ancient religious formulas of objurgation, obsecration, asseveration, anathema, etc. They express a desire to curse or bless, invite or repel. Where the original sense is lost they sink into interjections, the whole sense of which is in the accent. Their use rises and falls with fashion in nations, classes, groups, and families, and it controls the habits of individuals. Whether certain persons use a pious dialect, a learned (pedantic) dialect, a gambler's slang, a phraseology of excessive adjectives and silly expletives, or profane expressions, oaths, and phrases which abuse sacred things, depends on birth and training. In this sense each dialect is the language for each group and corresponds to the mores of the group. There may be some psychology of expletives,<sup>2</sup> but they seem to be accounted for, like slang, by the expediency of expression, which is the purpose of all language. There is a need for expression which will win attention and impress the memory. A strong expletive shocks an opponent, or it is an instinctive reaction on a situation which threatens the well-being of the speaker. It is a

vent to emotion  
which gives relief from it when other relief is  
not possible.  
This last is one of the chief useful reasons for  
expletives. However, even then they are a vicious habit, for  
stronger and  
stronger expressions are required to win the  
same subjective  
effects. Old expressions lose force. Slang is the  
new coinage.  
The mintage is often graphic and droll; it is also  
often stupid  
and vulgar. A selection goes on. Some of it is  
rejected and

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*Deutsche Frauenwelt*^ II, 65.

2

Patrick in *Psych. Rev.*, VIII, 113.